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SPECIFICATION

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I, Fuat J. Kerkinni, a citizen of the United States and resident of Lakeville, Minnesota, have invented certain new and useful improvements in:

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR TRACKING EQUIPMENT USAGE INFORMATION

of which the following is a specification:

Title: Method and System for Tracking Equipment Usage Information

1. Field

This invention relates to electronically tracking and reporting usage information. More particularly, this invention relates to a new method and system for an administrator to receive, store, compile, and report usage information, such as miles driven for a leased vehicle. The method and system may use the Internet or telephone interactive voice response systems.

2. Background

When an individual leases a vehicle through his/her employer, the vehicle may be used for business as well as personal travel. When the vehicle is driven for personal use, it might give rise to a taxable event. Keeping track of the personal distance driven versus the business distance driven is required so that the individual using the vehicle can properly report the usage information to the Internal Revenue Service ("IRS"). The IRS may also be interested in information such as the total distance driven and how much the individual has spent on maintenance for the vehicle. The out-of-pocket maintenance expenses might allow a person to take a credit for the money spent, setting off the money owed for personal use of the vehicle.

Although automobiles are common items for which usage information may be important, tracking usage information may also be important for other pieces of leased equipment. Although tracking personal usage information might not be an important issue for other types of equipment, such as construction equipment, tracking usage information in terms of hours of use may be desirable. For example, hours of use may be used to determine maintenance schedules or replacement schedules, and other usage characteristics may be important for a number of other purposes as known to those skilled in the relevant fields.

1 The task of keeping track of the personal distance driven, business distance driven, and
other related information has traditionally been done through the mail. The company leasing the
vehicle sends to the individual using the vehicle a postcard for the individual to fill out. The lessor
fills out by hand the pertinent information regarding the usage information, such as the distance
driven, whether the party has done any maintenance on the vehicle, and any other information that
6 the leasing company wishes to track. This postcard is then sent to the leasing company. When the
leasing company receives the postcard the information may be entered into a database system.
Entering the information into the database system may be a labor intensive operation involving
workers sorting the postcards and entering the usage information into the database. Reports of
usage information may be generated on a regular basis and sent to the individual with the equipment
to keep the individual updated on the pertinent information.

 The prior art process for tracking usage information has a number of problems. It is time
consuming, expensive, and tedious to mail information and to manually enter usage information in
order to track usage. In addition, individuals are not always on time when it comes to regularly
supplying usage information, and the process of mailing and filling out information by hand can be
16 tedious for individual lessors. Furthermore, the leasing company may encounter a labor intensive
process in sorting and entering usage information into tracking systems. Errors occur when the
usage information is not written clearly or when the data entry staff misreads the information.
Furthermore, if an individual customer wishes to request a report outside of the regular reporting
cycle, then that person must request the report from the leasing company, which typically involves
21 talking to a live person. These steps take time for both the individual customer and the

1 administrator (or leasing company). A more reliable and more efficient system is needed that
reduces processing costs for the leasing company and is easier for the individual lessor to use.

Summary

One embodiment of the invention is a method and system for tracking usage information by
an administrator for equipment. The administrator for the equipment may electronically solicit
6 personal usage information and business usage information for a specified period from a client. The
usage information may be tracked in monthly increments, quarters, or over whatever time period the
administrator desires. This usage information can be in the form of personal distance driven,
business distance driven, total distance driven, sums spent on equipment maintenance, and a variety
of other variables. The administrator then electronically receives and stores in a server database the
usage information for the equipment, processes the information, and generates a report for the
information.

A report may be generated for a specified period using the usage information for that
specified period. This report can be compiled as soon as the information is entered and then
continually updated each time new information is entered. When the individual customer requests a
16 report, then it is ready to be immediately sent out. Alternatively, the usage information can just be
stored in a ready to compile format. The usage information may then be compiled into a reportable
format upon request or at a regular interval for reporting.

One advantage of the invention is that it decreases the amount of administration time and
money spent by the system administrator in tracking usage information. In addition, it is convenient
21 and may save time for the user who reports the information. The administrator does not have to
deal with a large number of usage information postcards that may need to be sent, collected, and

1 then entered into a database. Furthermore, the user can enter in the usage information whenever it
is convenient. The method and system of the invention may also decrease errors due to decreased
human involvement in the reporting system.

In one embodiment of the invention, the system and method may be used to track personal
mileage and business mileage for leased vehicles. A report may then be generated that specifies the
6 taxable benefit (or income) to the driver of the leased vehicle based on the personal use of the
vehicle. This report may be automatically generated so that it saves the user a significant amount of
time in reporting information to the IRS for tax purposes.

Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a block diagram overview of a client server system in which the present invention
functions;

Figure 2 is a block diagram of the hardware of a client interface of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a block diagram of the hardware of a client interface of Figure 1;

Figure 4 is a block diagram of the server side database;

Figure 5 is a block diagram of the steps taken for a user to log onto the system and input
16 usage information into the server database;

Figure 6 is a block diagram showing how usage information can be compiled and reported;

Figure 7 is a block diagram showing how usage information can be compiled and reported;

Figure 8 shows an example of a welcome to the server system screen for use with the
Internet access;

21 Figure 9 shows an Internet version of the user log in screen;

Figure 10 shows a report of usage information; and

Figure 11 shows an Internet page in which a user can enter in new usage information.

Detailed Description

One embodiment of the invention allows a user to access a remote database and enter usage information for a reporting period for a piece of equipment. If the piece of equipment is a leased vehicle, for instance, the user may enter personal miles driven and business miles driven into the database for a specified period, such as for a one month period. This information may then be totaled and compiled so that reports may be generated for a reporting period. If, for instance, the invention is to be used to compile personal miles driven and business miles driven for a leased vehicle, a report may be generated at the end of a year so that the user may use the reported information for tax purposes. In other embodiments, the method and system of the invention may be used to keep track of maintenance concerns for a piece of equipment in order to notify the user when certain maintenance procedures may be performed. If the piece of equipment is construction equipment, for instance, the user may enter hours of use for a specified period. A report may then be generated at the appropriate time to notify the user of the need for a particular maintenance procedure.

The teachings of the present invention are applicable to many different types of computer networks and may also be used, for instance, in conjunction with direct on-line connections to databases. As will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art, while the following discussion sets forth various preferred implementations of the method and system of the present invention, these implementations are not intended to be restrictive of the appended claims, nor are they intended to imply that the claimed invention has limited applicability to one type of computer network. While the principles underlying the Internet and the Web are described in some detail

below in connection with various aspects of the present invention, this discussion is provided for descriptive purposes only and is not intended to imply any limiting aspects to the broadly claimed methods and systems of the present invention.

The Internet is widely used today for a variety of applications. The Internet is a collection of computer networks that allows computer users to share files and other computer resources.

Each computer connected to the Internet has a unique address whose format is defined by the Internet Protocol ("TCP/IP"). The Internet includes a public network using the TCP/IP and includes two kinds of computers: servers, which provide information and documents; and clients, which retrieve and display documents and information for users. As will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art, as used throughout this specification the term "client" refers to a client computer (or machine) on a network, or to a process or programs, such as Web browsers, which run on a client computer in order to facilitate network connectivity and communications. This specification will use the term "individual" or "user" when referring to a person using a client computer to access the server and enter usage information. Similarly, the term "server" will be used throughout this specification to refer to a server computer or computer system on a network, including the database attached to the server for storing information.

The "World Wide Web" ("Web") is that collection of servers on the Internet that utilize the Hypertext Transfer Protocol ("HTTP"). Upon login, HTTPS is used, which is an encrypted, secure version of HTTP. HTTP is a known application protocol that provides users access to resources, which may be information in different formats such as text, graphics, images, sound, video, Hypertext Markup Language ("HTML"), as well as programs. HTML is a standard page description language which provides basic document formatting and allows the developer to specify

1 “links” to other servers and files. Links may be specified via a Uniform Resource Locator (“URL”).

Upon specification of a link by the user, the client makes a TCP/IP request to a Web server and receives information, which may be another “Web page” that is formatted according to HTML.

Users can also access other pages on the same or other servers by following instructions on the screen, entering certain data, or clicking on selected icons.

6 Servers run on a variety of platforms, including UNIX machines, although other platforms, such as Windows 95, Windows NT, and Macintosh may also be used. Computer users can view information available on servers or networks on the Web through the use of browsing software, such as Netscape Navigator, Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mosaic, or Lynx browsers. A typical Web page is an HTML document with text, “links” that a user may activate (e.g. “click on”), as well as embedded URL’s pointing to resources, such as images, video or sound, that the client may activate to fully use the Web page in a browser. Furthermore, icons may be present which a user clicks on to submit usage information to the server, or to request information from the server. In some situations, these resources may not be located on the same server that provided the HTML document to the client. Furthermore, HTTP allows for the transmission of certain information from
16 the client to a server. The server can then post this information on its web site, forward it on to another user or server, or save it to a database for later use.

Telephone interactive voice response systems (“IVR”) may also be used for accessing and listening to information stored in a database. The IVR systems use computer software and voice recognition programs to run the system. Currently, many credit card companies, among other
21 businesses, use IVR systems for customer service functions. In these systems a user may access the system using a 1-800 number or other number to place the call through a standard touch-tone

1 telephone. Once dialed in, the user may be asked to touch or speak an identification code and a
password. The identification code can be in words represented by the letters on the telephone
keys, or simply numbers. Once the password and identification is accepted, an automated voice
will ask the user what information the user would like to access or what type of function the user
would like to perform. Prompting the user may be done by asking the user to touch or say a
6 number corresponding to the desired choice. The user may then make a selection and may be
further prompted to listen to the requested information or to enter new usage information. The IVR
user can enter information using the telephone keypad or by speaking. This information may be
read back by the IVR system in order to prompt the user to confirm that the information was
correctly entered and understood by the database system. Once the IVR use has finished using the
IVR system, the IVR user can log off the system by pressing a certain number on the keypad,
saying the number aloud, or simply hanging up.

The accompanying Figures depict features and components of the methods and systems of
the present invention. With regard to references in this specification to computers, the computers
may be any standard computer including standard attachments and components thereof (e.g., a disk
16 drive, hard drive, CD player or network server that communicates with a CPU and main memory, a
sound board, a keyboard and mouse, and a monitor). The processor of the CPU in the computer
may be any conventional general purpose single- or multi-chip microprocessor such as a Pentium®
processor, a Pentium® Pro processor, a 8051 processor, a MIPS® processor, a Power PC®
processor, or an ALPHA® processor. In addition, the processor may be any conventional special
21 purpose processor such as a digital signal processor or a graphics processor. The
microprocessor has conventional address lines, conventional data lines, and one or more

1 conventional control lines. With regard to references to software, the software may be standard
software used by those skilled in the art or may be coded in any standard programming language to
accomplish the tasks detailed below.

The telephone interactive device for an IVR system can also come in a variety of forms
which are commonly used in the art. These telephone systems may have an audio output device, a
6 microphone into which the user can speak, and a keypad on which the user can enter numbers.
Some of these phones will be connected to a base which is then connected to a conventional land
line through a standard telephone jack. Other phones may have no connection to the base, or even
no land line connection.

A. General Overview

Figure 1 is a block diagram illustration of the environment of one embodiment of the present
invention, which is a network based on a client-server model. The network comprises one or more
servers 10 which are accessible by one or more user interface devices 14, such as personal
computers or telephones. Figure 1 illustrates a user interface device 14, which may be either a
client computer, a touch tone telephone, or another interface device known to those skilled in the
16 art. The servers 10 communicate with the user interface device 14 over a communication
pathway 12, which may be a direct dial connection, the Internet or other suitable
telecommunications path. A suitable network protocol, such as the TCP/IP protocol, may be used
for the communications. For an IVR system, communications may be done by voice interactive
technology known in the art or by pushbutton commands. The servers 10 may comprise Web
21 servers and application servers, and may be any computer known to those skilled in the art. The
Web server and the application server can be separate entities, or may exist within a single

1 computer or computer system. This specification will refer to both possibilities as server 10. The
server 10 allows access by the user interface devices 14 to various network resources.

1. The Client-Side

Figures 2 and 3 show two different embodiments of a user interface device 14 that may be
used within the scope of the invention. As described above, the client's user interface device 14
6 may be any conventional computer known to those skilled in the art or may also be a standard
telephone. Figure 2 shows the basic layout of a client computer 16 as a user interface device 14
and Figure 3 shows the basic construction of a telephone 30 as a user interface device 14.

In Figure 2, the client computer 16 comprises a central processor unit ("CPU") and main
memory 18, an input/output interface 22 for communicating with various databases, files, programs,
and networks (such as the Internet), and one or more storage devices 20. The storage devices 20
may be disk drive devices or CD ROM devices. The client computer 16 may also have a monitor
24 or other screen device and an input device such as a keyboard 26 or a mouse 28. In order to
carry out the present invention over the Internet, the client computer 16 may also have some
software programs contained in the main memory 18 or the storage devices 20 which can be used
16 by the CPU 18.

In one embodiment of the present invention, a Web browser, which is a known software
tool used to access the Web via a connection obtained through an Internet access provider, may be
part of the software programs on the client computer 16. A variety of browsers known to those
skilled in the art may be used within the scope of the present invention, including Netscape
21 Navigator, Microsoft Internet Explorer, or Mosaic browsers. As explained above, a Web server
may allow access to so-called "Web sites" and "Web pages." Once the Web browser has

1 accessed these pages through the Web server, the HTML page may be downloaded through the
input/output interface 22. The central processing unit 18 may use the browser software package to
interpret the information and display it on the monitor 24. The software programs on the client
computer 16 may also contain other software or programs which will allow the user to fill in
information on the screens and to exchange data with the server 10.

6 The telephone for use in an IVR embodiment of the invention is represented in Figure 3.
The telephone 30 has an input/output device 32 which allows it to receive and send information
over the telephone communication system. The telephone 30 may also have a keypad 34 that
allows the user to enter phone numbers, letters, or numbers. As is known in the art, this keypad 34
can take many different sizes and shapes, but normally will contain ten digits and two symbols. The
telephone may also have a speaker 36 that allows the user to hear the spoken information. The
spoken information is transferred over the telephone system through methods known in the art and
interpreted by the telephone's CPU 40 into speech that comes out of the speaker 36. The user
also may input information by voice through a microphone 38. For the IVR system that this
invention may employ, the client can use either the keypad 34 or the microphone 38 to enter
16 information.

2. The Server-Side

Figure 4 shows a possible server configuration for the system of Figure 1. The server 10
contains software programs 45 that run on the server-side to process requests and responses from
the user's interface. In addition, the software programs 45 may send information to the client,
21 perform compilation and storage functions, and generate reports that may be used by either the
client or the system administrator. If the Internet is the user's interface, then the server 10 may also

1 send web pages in HTML format for the user to download and interpret with his/her computer and
view on a monitor. If the user utilizes the IVR format, the server 10 may send responses in the form
of automated speech.

The server 10 may be set up in a variety of different formats to perform the functions of the
invention. One possible format is shown in Figure 4, although other formats may also be used
6 within the scope of the invention. The server 10 may be set up to incorporate a client database 50
in a database storage area 52, or the server 10 may simply be connected to a client database 50 at
a remote site in much the same way as the server 10 and user interface devices 14 are connected.
The client database 50 may include information on a variety of clients, two of which are shown as
User 1 (numeral 54) and User X (numeral 56) in Figure 4.

The server 10 may be separated into software programs 45 and database storage areas 52,
which contain the client databases 50. As noted above, the storage areas 52 can be incorporated
into the same system as the server 10, or the server 10 may be remotely connected to the client
database 50. The database storage area 52 of the system may be further broken up by client and
also by piece of equipment. If, for example, the invention is used to track miles for leased vehicles,
16 a given client may have a large fleet of vehicles with each vehicle being driven by a different driver.
The database structure of the server 10 may, therefore, be structured such that a number of vehicles
corresponding to different drivers may be included in a given folder for a client within a database.
For simplicity, Figure 4 depicts two users, User 1 (numeral 54) and User X (numeral 56), which
may correspond to different vehicles in a vehicle tracking embodiment of the invention.

21 Figure 4 depicts two specified periods, specified period 1 (numeral 58) and specified
period X (numeral 60). Each specified period 58, 60, of which any number may exist in the server

1 10, refers to a period for which a user would commonly report usage information, such as a period
of one week or one month. Within each specified period 58, 60, various types of information may
be stored, such as personal usage information 62, business usage information 64, total usage
information 66, and personal credits 68. For each specified period 58, 60, therefore, the user may
enter these types of information. Personal usage information 62 may, in one embodiment, refer to
6 personal miles driven for a leased vehicle; business usage information 64 may refer to business miles
driven; total usage information 66 may refer to the sum of personal and business usage information
62, 64; and a personal credit may refer to money spent by the user for maintenance for a vehicle
during the specified period 58, 60. A variety of other types of information may also be included
within the specified periods 58, 60, such as an ending odometer reading for a vehicle, a beginning
odometer reading for a vehicle, or any other type of information for which tracking may be
desirable.

A reporting period, as represented by numeral 70 and 80 in Figure 4, may refer to a period
for which a report may be generated. For instance, a yearly report or monthly report may be
generated by totaling the information in for the specified periods 58, 60. Numerals 72, 74, 76, and
16 78, therefore, may simply be the total of the information for the specified periods 58, 60.

B. Operation of the Invention

Figures 5-7 illustrate flow diagrams of the operation of one embodiment of the invention.
Figure 5 shows a block diagram of the acts of logging onto the system and inputting usage
information into the server database. Figure 5 will be described in terms of an Internet embodiment
21 of the invention, although this flow diagram is equally applicable to an IVR embodiment of the
invention. The individual customer may access 110 the Internet application by typing in the

1 appropriate TCP/IP address and downloading the HTML formatted web page. The user may first
be directed to a welcome page, one embodiment of which is shown in Figure 8. Alternatively, a
user may access 110 the IVR application by dialing in using a standard telephone. Once the
connection is made, the user may need to log on 114 to the database server 10. To log on 114 to
the database, the user may be prompted to enter an identification and a password 114. One
6 embodiment of an identification and password Web page for the Internet is shown in Figure 9.
After the user logs into the database, the user may begin to access or enter information. The server
database may prompt the user to select a function 116 for which the user wishes to work with. The
user may select to review previously entered data 124, request a report 126, or request to enter
new data 128.

11 If the user decides to review previously entered data 124, the user may enter 130 a
specified period for which to review the usage information. The server database may then recall the
usage information and display the usage information to the user 132 in an embodiment such as that
shown in Figure 10. If the data for the selected time period has not been completely entered, the
server database system may prompt the user to enter the remaining data 120 for any number of
16 specified periods. In an Internet embodiment of the invention, the information may be downloaded
and displayed 132 on the user's computer using an HTML file. In a IVR embodiment, the data
may be spoken by the computer, one field at a time. Figure 10, for instance, depicts an
embodiment in which the invention is used for reporting personal and business miles for a leased
vehicle. Information in each of the fields depicted in Figure 10 may therefore be displayed in one
21 embodiment of the invention. Figure 10 shows such information as the odometer reading of the

1 vehicle, personal miles, total miles, percent personal miles, personal credits, and the beginning and ending dates of the reporting period.

The user may make the appropriate selection from the menu of options to request a report 126. The user may have to enter information for each specified period 134 for which the report is requested. If all of the relevant usage information has not been entered for the requested reporting 6 period 135, the user may be prompted to enter the new usage information 120 before the report can be properly compiled and the information reported 136. Once the software programs of the server database have confirmed that all of the usage information has been entered for a given reporting period, then the report may be printed and sent to the client, or, in other embodiments, the report may simply be spoken to the user or downloaded to the client computer so that the user can view the information.

If the user desires to enter new data 128 for a given specified period or reporting period, the server database may first prompt the user to select a relevant specified period 118 for usage information entry. The usage information may be entered in any unit that is appropriate for the type of information. If, for instance, a vehicle mile reporting embodiment of the invention is used, the 16 usage information may be entered in miles for individuals in the United States or in kilometers for individuals in other countries. In an Internet version the server database may then display blank fields 120 on a new web page in which the user may enter the usage information 120. Figure 11 shows an example of how the user can input business distance, personal distance, total distance, and the ending odometer reading in a vehicle mile reporting embodiment of the invention. Drop- 21 down boxes or other types of information entry applications known to those skilled in the art may also be used for entry of usage information. Figure 11 also shows other information that may be

1 displayed in one embodiment of the invention, including the type of vehicle for which the individual is
entering usage information, what specified periods or reporting periods need information entered,
and the company to which the vehicle is leased. Figure 11 also shows various buttons that may be
used within the scope of the invention, such as a submit button, a clear entries button, and a report
button. In addition, Figure 11 shows information on the user of the vehicle, the company leasing the
6 vehicle, and other information. In an IVR version the server database may prompt the user to enter
a given field, and then move on to the next given field after the user has entered usage information,
or at the direction of the user.

The invention may be set up to automatically verify the accuracy of the entered information.
In a mile reporting embodiment of the invention for leased vehicles, for instance, the system may
verify the accuracy of entered information by simply assuming that certain distances (such as 2500
miles, 5000 miles, or 10,000 miles) are typically not driven in a one month period. If such a number
is entered by a user for personal miles or business miles, the system may ask the user to verify that
such a number is accurate or, alternatively, may simply not allow the user to enter such a number.
In addition, the system may require the user to enter the ending odometer distance for each
16 reporting period. If the user attempts to enter a distance driven that is larger than the difference
between an odometer reading at the end of a month minus the odometer reading at the end of the
previous month, the software programs of the system can assume that an incorrect number has been
entered. Logic may therefore look at the ending odometer readings to determine if entered usage
information has been properly entered. A number of other logic features to prompt the user to enter
21 certain information or specify that certain information appears to be incorrect may be incorporated
into the invention.

1 After usage information has been entered, it may be used for a number of applications, such
as for maintenance schedules or tax reporting purposes. In an embodiment of the invention for mile
reporting, a report may be generated that is useful for tax reporting purposes of personal miles
driven and business miles driven. Another feature of the invention may include automated
prompting for a user to enter information. For instance, if a user has not entered information for a
6 given specified period, such as the month of January, the system may prompt the user to enter
information for that month by either sending an email reminder to the user, leaving a telephone
message for the user, or using a reminder window on a Web page to remind the user of the need to
enter information for a given specified period.

Figure 10 shows an example of a report generated for an embodiment of the invention used
for tax reporting purposes for leased vehicles. Figure 10 shows a number of columns that include
information for monthly periods on odometer readings, personal miles driven, total miles, percent
personal miles, a personal credit, and the days that the car was available to the user. The bottom
portion of Figure 10 shows a report of the usage information that has been used to generate
information for tax purposes, namely a taxable benefit. The taxable benefit is essentially the amount
16 of money that is considered non-cash compensation to the driver and that may be included on a W2
tax form in the United States. In one embodiment, such as that shown in Figure 10, the user may
change reported information by typing, printing, or entering information on the lines below the
reported information for each period. This information may then be updated and the reported
modified accordingly.

21 The summary in Figure 10 illustrates the number of specified periods (or months) for which
the report has usage information (for the five periods at the top of Figure 10). The report uses an

1 annual lease value (value of the lease over a year-long period). This annual lease value is then
multiplied by the number of days for which the vehicle has been used by the driver (150 in Figure
10) to come up with a result which is the value of the leased vehicle over the period of usage. This
value is then multiplied by the percent of personal use of the vehicle to come up with a result, which
is the taxable benefit for the vehicle, excluding credits. Figure 10 also shows a credit of \$605.00
6 (maintenance expenses) and a fuel benefit (amount spent on fuel per mile multiplied by the number
of miles the vehicle was driven). The fuel benefit uses a standard benefit value of 5.5 cents per mile,
although this number may be altered, and is simply an approximated number used for tax purposes.

Figure 10 also calculates the taxable benefit of the leased vehicle if miles were not reported
for a given period (which may be a given month for which usage information was not entered). In
this instance, the report may simply assume that the vehicle was used solely for personal use and
may increase the taxable benefit accordingly. If usage information for all time periods has been
reported, the number of reporting periods with missing data will be 0 and no additional taxable
benefit will result. Figure 10 indicates a taxable benefit over a 5-month period of -200.43, which
indicates that the driver of the vehicle has no taxable benefit over this time period. In addition to the
calculations shown on Figure 10, such a report may also show maintenance schedules, replacement
16 schedules, and other information which depends on the distance the vehicle has been driven and/or
the time during which the vehicle has been in use.

Referring again to Figure 5, once the usage information is displayed 132 the report
requested 136, or the usage information entered 120, the user may then go back to the beginning to
21 perform other operations. To go back to the beginning, the user may simply select the appropriate
menu option 138. Alternatively, the user can exit the database 134.

1 To exit the system 142, the Internet version user may first log off 140 the server database.
Logging off 140 may ensure that if the computer is left on and connected to the server database,
another user or passerby could not alter the previously entered usage information or enter incorrect
usage information. To log off 140 the IVR system, the user may select the proper key
corresponding to the correct menu item, say the number corresponding to the correct menu item, or
6 simply hang up. Once the user has logged off 140 and exited 142 the system, the server database
may compile the information entered.

Figure 6 shows a flow diagram of a method for reporting the usage information. The server
database in this diagram may store the entered usage information 152 and also may send a copy to
be immediately compiled into a report 154. This report 154 may be updated every time usage
information is entered into the system. When a report is requested 156 for a reporting period, the
server database may select the appropriate part of the compiled data and may send a report 158
for the reporting period.

Figure 7 shows another way that the server database may compile reports for reporting
periods. As in the embodiment of Figure 6, the user may have just logged off the system 160 and
16 now the server database must handle the newly entered usage information. The server database
may store the database 162 as before, but does not have to send it off to be compiled right away as
in Figure 6. The server database may simply collect the usage information and store the raw data
162. When a report is requested 164 for a reportable period, or the day comes for a regular report
to be issued, the server database may compile the usage information into a report 166. This report
21 is then sent 168 to the appropriate party. In this embodiment, the software programs of the server
may build a report upon request from a user (or alternatively at intermittent periods).

1 While the present invention has been described with reference to several embodiments
thereof, those skilled in the art may recognize various changes that may be made without departing
from the spirit and scope of the claimed invention. Accordingly, this invention is not limited to what
is shown in the drawings and described in the specification but only as indicated in the appended
claims. Any number or ordering of the elements in the following claims is merely for convenience
6 and is not intended to suggest that the ordering of the elements of the claims has any particular
significance other than that otherwise expressed by the language of the claims.

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